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Notes for an Address
by the Honourable Anne McLellan,

Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada

Annual General Meeting Of The Calgary John Howard Society

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As-delivered

Thank you very much Gary (Dixon). Good afternoon, everyone. I think I'm just going to take a few minutes to adjust this (microphone), so that people can hear me. Now, that's on, right?

It is a great pleasure to be here this afternoon and have the opportunity to speak to all of you who are committed to the John Howard Society and committed to the programs and goals of the John Howard Society. And as you know, you are one of a network of John Howard Societies across this country, all of whom play an important role in building bridges between people who come into conflict with the justice system and the community as a whole.

And as John (Ellard) mentioned a few minutes ago, he has asked me to say a few words today about youth and the law. Now, I will say a few things about our proposed new youth justice legislation. But I actually wanted to talk more generally about "Youth and the Law". And I want to talk about some of the things that John actually referred to.

Because, for us in the Government of Canada, and I think in more and more communities across our country and especially here in Alberta, prevention of crime is becoming an important focus of everything we do. And Gary took the opportunity to comment on how in fact, although our province may have a certain stereotype in relation to issues surrounding law and order, this province is indeed one of the most progressive when it comes to prevention.

And I have had the pleasure recently of working with my colleague the Attorney General of Alberta, David Hancock, who believes that — really if one is talking about justice, one is talking about safe communities and safe families — that it all has to start in communities. And I think most of you believe that. I believe that. And then it is a case of how we put that all together, to actually prevent crime from happening in the first place and making sure our young people have viable options, so that they don't get into trouble with the law.

So those are some of the things I would like to talk about this afternoon with you. But I will say a few words, obviously, about the new legislation that we are proposing. And let me say right off the bat that I appreciate constructive comment from the John Howard Society. I have heard from many, both through your National Executive and local members in Edmonton and elsewhere. And I appreciate very much the constructive commentary that your organization has provided to me, my department and the government as we move forward with the renewal of the youth justice

system.

When the Government of Canada decided to overhaul the youth justice system several years ago, we did so in response to what Canadians were telling us. Most had lost confidence in the *Young Offenders Act*. And even to us, the system didn't seem to be working very well, with more and more young people going to jail for relatively minor offences.

To change the system we set up the Youth Justice Renewal Strategy — launched in consultation with the provinces, territories and experts who work in the field.

The Strategy takes a holistic approach to youth justice — going beyond the narrow enforcement of the law to look at the big picture of young people's lives. It encourages us to look at the root causes of youth crime, as well as to strengthen our ability to help young people in trouble with the law to turn their lives around.

The cornerstone of the Strategy is the "Youth Justice Act" —Bill C-3. Currently under study by Parliament, the proposed Act lays the basis for a comprehensive approach to youth justice — one that upholds and promotes important social values, such as responsibility and accountability, both on the part of the youth involved with the law and society as a whole.

Emphasizing prevention, meaningful and appropriate consequences, and rehabilitation, the proposed Act will make it possible to choose from a broad range of options to deal with the circumstances of each offender and the offence he or she has committed. Police warnings. Restitution. Community service. Literacy training. Drug and alcohol counseling. Family, victim and community involvement. All these positive approaches will be possible under the new legislation.

Our goal is to build a youth justice system that is both relevant and respected by youth and by other members of the community.

But obviously fine words alone won't be enough to earn this kind of respect. The proof will be in the quality of our implementation. And in our ability to build effective links between the youth justice system and the myriad of other players (many of whom you represent) — provincial governments, municipalities, social and health services, educators, families, victims, communities — who have a role to play in shaping the lives of our young people.

I have every confidence that we will be able to do this together. Canadians know that young people who have committed an offence can become productive members of society. And in fact, nobody knows that better than the John Howard Society. And I suppose, John, it's fair to say that when stripped to its core, the essence of your mandate is to help those who have been in trouble, turn their lives around and become productive members of society. And we have to believe that profoundly. Because if we don't I think we have a very bleak and arid view of the society in which we live.

And that's why I think it so important for organizations like yours or communities like this one, or governments like ours and the provincial government to work together to define the strategies that help people turn their lives around and become productive members of society.

Now, when we think about all this, what are the things, what are the starting points when we think about youth justice and helping young people and keeping them out of trouble?

I think as John said earlier, the first step is prevention. The first step is the identification of root causes of crime. And you know prevention is something that we are hearing more and more about today. And I say thankfully so. In part because the federal government has developed a National Strategy around crime prevention, working with local communities all over this country.

And you know, if you look at the science, if you look at the studies and all the experts — some of whom are in this room -- there is an increasing body of evidence that early intervention works. That by getting involved early, we can mitigate — or even turn around — the negative effects of poverty, substance abuse, poor parenting, violence and victimization that can cause young people to act out against the world around them.

This is why children and youth are such an important priority for our government. It is the reason why the National Children's Agenda focuses on support for parents and families. And it is the reason why the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention — which provides $32 million annually to support community-based responses to crime — attaches such importance to programs and partnerships that help children and young people to get a leg up on life.

The National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention uses a social development approach to work with communities across the country — including ethnocultural communities — to address the underlying causes of crime. It is part of our government's commitment to fostering safer homes and safer streets.

Why the focus on community-based solutions? Because, ladies and gentlemen, communities are closer to the situation and often know best what resources will work and how they should be directed to make a difference with the problem at hand.

Since its inception, the National Strategy has assisted over 1,000 community-based projects all across Canada. Here in Alberta, the Strategy has supported over 80 projects — here in Calgary, in Edmonton and in smaller communities like High Prairie, Slave Lake, Red Deer, Okotoks — to name just a few. In fact, earlier this month, I did have the pleasure of announcing with my colleague, the provincial Attorney General, further Government of Canada support for 27 new projects, totaling almost $795,000.

As many of you know from your own experience working on grassroots projects with the John Howard Society, these are unique kinds of community investments. There are no bricks and mortar. These are direct investments in people and the quality of their lives.

And before I give you a few examples of what I'm talking about, let me say something to you. And most of you probably know this, because you work in the prevention area and are committed to dealing with root causes of crime in the criminal justice system.

Do you know how much we, the federal and provincial government, spend on an annual basis in the criminal justice system after someone has been hurt — after their property has been destroyed and the police are involved, the prosecutors are involved, the courts and the jails are involved? You know what that price tag is for Canadians? $32 billion a year. That's our criminal justice system at all levels - all components.

$32 billion a year! And think about when that system kicks in - it's a completely reactive system. It reacts after we created another victim. It reacts after another person has been hurt, or another person's property has been destroyed. That's when the police are called. That's when charges are laid and prosecutions are commenced and people are put in jail.

Wouldn't it be nice if we could take some of those $32 billion and develop a proactive strategy to prevent another victim from being created? Wouldn't it be nice if we could take only $1 billion of that $32 billion and put it on the front end? The proactive end of working in communities with communities, marshalling your resources to work with young people, to work with families, to identify the root causes that lead young people and others down a path of criminal activity.

You know one of our goals as a civil society has to be to change the balance so that we are not always reacting after someone has been hurt. But that in fact we are becoming proactive and prevent the hurt in the first place. Doesn't that make sense to you? Why would we spend all this

money after someone's been hurt and all the pain and the anger and the loss of productive capacity? It makes so much more sense if we can prevent that from happening.

And you know we have it within each one of us, in every community in which we live in this country, to change that balance and to make that difference and to become proactive. And each one of us owes it to ourselves, our families, our communities and our country to take ownership and responsibility for some small part of our safety and our security.

And that's what the National Strategy on Crime Prevention is all about. In 1,000 communities - and there will be more, there are more every day - people are saying "It's no longer simply the responsibility of the police and the prosecutors and the courts and the jails, if we really want to have safe and secure communities where we can all live and prosper". Each one of us has a little piece of the puzzle. Each one of us has part of the solution and each one of us has responsibilities. And I know I am preaching to the converted, because you all would not be here if you did not believe that.

But what is amazing - and the National Strategy was not the cause of this, in fact the National Strategy was given birth because people all over this country were telling us "Hey, we want to be involved because we don't think the traditional criminal justice system working alone is the answer. The traditional criminal justice system standing by itself does not make us feel all that much safer or more secure. And what we want to do is work in our communities to identify where are the problems, who is in trouble, who is committing the crime, who is in danger of committing crimes. And let's pool our resources and let's work together to identify why that's happening and let's prevent it from happening".

And you know there are amazing things happening all over this country. And I just want to give you a few examples. One of which we are going to hear a lot more about a little later. And this is Youth Justice, and three of the young people involved in this project are sitting at the table here to my right. And this is an interactive web site hosted and sponsored by the Calgary John Howard Society. It is managed by a group of dedicated young people, who volunteer their time and talents to educate their peers about issues surrounding the youth justice system.

This group of young people includes young offenders, victims of crime and youth with technical interests - quite a variety of backgrounds. But they have one thing in common - they want to make their communities safer for themselves and for others.

I would like to congratulate this group of young people on their success so far. Their web site is becoming amazingly popular, as I understand it. And recently some of them traveled to Ottawa to participate in a Youth Justice Renewal Initiative Round Table hosted by my department.

Let me give you another example that I just read about this morning in the paper — Youth council battles crime and stereotypes. And this is a group called *North of McKnight Youth Council*. This is again a group of young people who decided there are things they can do in the north end of this city to prevent crime and to help keep their friends, their peers out of trouble with the law. Another example of people in the community, young people themselves, assisted by others saying "There are things we can do. We don't want to see any more of our friends get into trouble with the law. We don't want to see more of them go to jail. Let's get together and figure out a way we can prevent our friends from getting into trouble".

You know, just another quick example I'll give you is one that comes from my own City of Edmonton. And just a couple of weeks ago, David Hancock and I (as I mentioned) made an announcement of some new projects, 27 for the Province of Alberta. And there were two people there talking about their experiences in two of the toughest parts of our City of Edmonton. One from Beverly Towne and the other from Dickinsfield. I'll just tell you about the Dickinsfield experience. This is a high crime area in our city. It's an area where you have a lot of single parents, not a lot for the kids to do. An area where you have a large number of urban Aboriginal

people, who come from the reserves to live, a fair number of new immigrants to our community, a lot of domestic violence, a lot of drugs, a lot of alcohol, very high crime rates.

Three years ago the people of Dickinsfield - they almost all live in high rises, which compounds the problem. It is very much an urban inner city area with high rises, subsidized housing. And the people who work there said "We don't want this any more. We have got to do better for ourselves and for our kids". So the people they started talking to first were the police, who went to so many doors in Dickinsfield to take people away or to break up fights, or whatever the case may be.

And the police and the community were instrumental in developing a community-based network of resources and early intervention strategies. So that three years later the crime rate in Dickinsfield has been reduced by 40 percent. What an amazing success story!

And you know what? The other part of the success story is not only about a 40 percent reduction in crime rates. The success is when you talk to the police who work in that area. Who say; "You know - when I see the kids on the streets now, they don't see me as their enemy. They don't see me as the guy who comes to take their mom or their dad away, or take them away. They see me as a part of this community, who is there working to support them, to help them when they're in trouble". And you know what an amazing transformation.

And that has happened all over this country. In communities here, in Edmonton and elsewhere. So it seems to me that these projects offer a thoughtful and creative response to the difficult and complex issues of crime and victimization. Together they illustrate the belief — and the guiding principle of the National Strategy — that our justice system must and can do more to prevent the underlying causes of crime.

You know, our intuition tells us that this is the best approach. The good ideas found in these projects merely affirm our instincts. But if further evidence were ever required, we need only to consider the consequences and lost potential of inaction — the fundamental human tragedy of a young life going in the wrong direction, of a neighbourhood victimized by fear and of a society starting to turn inward.

We may also want to remember that it costs $100,000 a year to incarcerate a young person who breaks the law. That it costs anywhere from $40,000 to $80,000 to keep an adult criminal in a security facility. And that we are spending $10 billion a year - at the federal level — to maintain the criminal justice system as a whole. And when you add the provinces and other levels of government — $32 billion. Clearly, crime prevention is not just good common sense; it is good economic sense.

Investments at the front end — in children, young people and their families — can reduce the burden on our economy, our society and our communities.

And as I hope you have seen, partnership is at the heart of our National Strategy. It is also fundamental to the renewal of our youth justice system. Preventing crime. Supporting youth. Encouraging community safety. These are all big jobs — jobs that are beyond the scope of any one idea, any one plan or any one government. They require commitment. They require imagination. They require courage. And they require resolve.

The Youth Justice Renewal Strategy and the National Strategy on Community Safety and Crime Prevention are both far-reaching in their objectives. Each will only succeed if we are able to actively engage Canadians — from all sectors of society — in their implementation.

I know that here at the Calgary John Howard Society you are familiar with the power of partnerships to make good things happen. Whether you are working on literacy training, violence education, or the Victim Offender Reconciliation Program, you know the power of partnerships to build bridges between members of the community and bring them together around a single focus.

I would like to use this occasion to encourage you to keep on building those bridges — to keep on with your efforts to increase public understanding of and involvement in the justice system.

I would also like to thank you for the time and energy so many of you put into this cause as volunteers. Safe, healthy and caring communities are only built by people like you — people who come forward with fresh ideas and workable solutions, and people who care about their neighbours and what kind of society we live in.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak, and good luck with your meeting today.

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